

# THE Princess Virginia

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## CHAPTER TWO

**T**WILIGHT fell late in the tiny Rhaetian village of Alleheiligen. So high on the mountain side were perched the simple inn and the group of brown chalets clustering round the big church, with its bulbous oriental spire, that they caught the last red rays of sunset and held them flashing on burnished copper roof plates and jewel-like small, bright window panes long after the green valley below was curtained with shadow.

One September evening two dusty traveling carriages toiled up the steep, winding road that led to the highest hamlet of the Rhaetian Alps, and a girl walking beside the foremost driver (unhired, as he was, to save the faded horses) looked up to see Alleheiligen glittering like a necklace of gems on the brown throat of the mountain. Each window was a great, separate ruby set in gold; the copper belfry crowned the church steeple with a burning carbuncle, while above the flashing band of gorgeous color the mountain reared its head, facing westward, its steadfast features carved in stone, the brow snow capped and rose where the sun touched it, blue where the shadows lay.

The driver assured the young English lady, whom he much admired for her pluck as well as beauty, that she had far better return to the carriage; that indeed she need not have left it. Her extra weight would be but as that of a feather to the horses, which were used to carrying far heavier loads than that of today up the steep mountain road to Alleheiligen in the "high" season of July and August, when many tourists from all countries came to rest for a night and see the wonderful view.

He even grew volatile in his persuasions, but the girl still smilingly insisted that she liked walking and the brown-faced fellow with the soft green hat and curly cock feather admired her the more for her firmness and endurance.

She was plainly dressed in gray, which did not show the dust, and though her skirt and short jacket were well made and her neat little hat jaunty and becoming—almost dangerous—becoming—she was not half as grand in appearance as some of the ladies who drove up with him in July and August. Still, the man said to himself, there was an air about her—no; he could not describe it even to himself—but it meant distinction. And then, as she was English, it was as pleasing as it was remarkable that she could speak Rhaetian so prettily. She had learned it, she said, when he respectfully ventured a question, because since she was a child she had taken an interest in Rhaetian history and literature. And this seemed strange to him—that so dainty a lady should have learned such a language for pleasure, because the people of most countries found it excessively difficult—as difficult as Hungarian and just enough like German to make it even more difficult perhaps. But this English girl said she had picked it up easily, and the young man's heart warmed to her when she praised Rhaetian music and Rhaetian poetry.

This was the last touch. This won him wholly, and without stopping further to analyze or account for his admiration the driver of the first carriage found himself bestowing confidences upon his gracious companion as they slowly tramped up the winding road, the reins looped over his arm. He told her of his life—how he had not always lived down there in the valley and driven tourists for a living.

They did enter and presently wrote their names as Lady Mowbray, Miss Mowbray, Miss Manchester and maid. An hour later when the newcomers' mother, daughter and dame de compagnie sat down to a hot supper in a tschamber, hastily but skilfully transformed into a private dining room, the youngest of the three remarked to Frau Yorvan upon the peaceful stillness of her house.

"One would think there wasn't a soul about the place except ourselves," said she, "yet you've told us you have other guests."

"The gentlemen who are stopping here are away all day long in the mountains," explained Frau Yorvan.

"It is now the time for chamois hunting, and it is for that and also the climbing of a strange group of rocks called the Bunch of Needles, only to be done by great experts, that they come to me."

"They are out late this evening. Aren't you beginning to be a little anxious about them if they go to such dangerous places?"

"Oh, tonight, gracious fraulein, they will not return at all," said the landlady, warming impulsively to the subject. "They often stop at a kind of hut they have near the top of the mountain to begin some climb they may wish to undertake very early. They are much closer to it there, you see, and it saves their wasting several hours on the way. They are constantly in the habit of stopping at the hut in fine weather. But they are very considerate. They always let me know their plans beforehand."

"If they're away so much I think it a little selfish in them to keep your one private sitting room when you might need it for others," remarked the girl.

"Oh, but gracious fraulein, you must say that!" cried the old woman, looking as much shocked as if her young guest had broken one of the commandments.

The girl laughed. "Why not?" she inquired. "Are the gentlemen of such importance that they mustn't be criticised by strangers?"

Frau Yorvan was embarrassed. "They are excellent patrons of mine, gracious fraulein; that is all I mean," said she. "I cannot bear that such things should be thought of such good gentlemen."

"I was only joking," the girl reassured her. "We are perfectly satisfied with this room, which you have made most comfortable. All I care for is that the famous walks in the neighborhood shall not be private. I may at least walk as much as I like and even climb a little, I and my friend, Miss Manchester, who is a daring mountaineer—with this she threw a glance at the middle aged lady in black, who suddenly started and grew wild-eyed."—response—"for I suppose that your rooms have not engaged the whole Schatz for their own."

The landlady's hospitable smile returned. "No anxious fraulein. You are free to wander as you will, but do not, I beg you, go too far or at any climatic or real difficulty, for they are not to be done without guides—and take care you do not stray into dangerous places where by making some inadvertent or sound before you were led to the hunting you might be mislead for a chamois."

"Even our process is hardly likely to lead us into such peril as that," laughed the girl, who seemed much more friendly and unassuming now, concerning than the two or three of the party. "But please walk as early to-morrow morning. My friend Miss Manchester and I would like to have breakfast and be ready for a start by 8 o'clock at latest."

"Has your emperor been here?" asked the young lady.

"It may be," answered Alois gaily; "it may be. Our emperor has two to most places."

His companion smiled and put him more at ease.

Slowly they climbed on the two carriages, containing the English girl's mother, a middle aged companion, a French maid and a reasonable supply of luggage tolling up behind, the horses jingling with a faint sound, as on fairy bells.

Then at last they came to the inn—a quaint house, half of stone, half of red brown shingles, a huge picture crowded with salutes of special importance to Alleheiligen painted in once crude now faded colors on a swinging sign. A characteristic yodeling cry from Alois sent forth before the highest tier of the road was reached brought an apple cheeked and white capped woman to the door. Then it was the youngest of the travelers who came with a pleasant greeting in Rhaetian for the best suit of rooms which Frau Yorvan could give.

But, to the girl's astonishment, the landlady showed none of the delight her son had predicted. Surprised she certainly was, even startled and certainly embarrassed. For an instant she seemed to hesitate before replying; then her emotion was partly explained by her words. Unfortunately her best rooms were engaged—four of the bed-rooms with the choicest view and the one private sitting room the inn possessed. But if the ladies would put up with the second best she would gladly accommodate them. Was it but for the night? Oh, for several nights! (Again the apple face looked dubious.) Well, if the ladies would graciously enter and choose from what she had to offer she would be honored.

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"Then you think that he is really here—in this out-of-the-way mountain hall," whispered the grand duchess.

"I am sure he is," answered Princess Virginia.

For a moment there was silence. Then said the grand duchess, with an air of resignation. "Well, I suppose we should be glad, since we have come to Rhaetia for the purpose. Dear me! I can scarcely bring myself to say it."

"You may say it, since our dear old lamb of a Leitha knows all about it and is in with us," returned Virginia.

"But, but I truly didn't expect to find him here. One knows he comes sometimes—it's been in the papers—but this time they had it that he'd gone to make a week's visit to poor old General von Borsdorff at the baths of Melina, and I thought forsooth we went to Kronburg with all our pretty letters of introduction, as he was away from the palace there, it would be likely to use up the time with a visit to Alleheiligen. I don't want you and Leitha to think that I was just making cat-paws of you both and forcing you without knowing to help me unearth him in his lair. Still, as he is here!"

"Perhaps he isn't," suggested the grand duchess. "I don't see that you have much ground for fancying so."

"Oh, general," echoed Virginia scornfully. "It's instinct that I go upon, not ground that woman's face when she saw foreign tourists at her door out of season when she had a right to think she was safe from invasion; her sham merriment about the best rooms being taken; her wish to get rid of us; her distress that she couldn't possibly do so without making matters worse; the way she talks of her four gentlemen; her horror at my leze majesty; her confusion about the portraits; her wish to impress it upon us that Usser Leo is quite changed. Instinct ought to be ashamed if it couldn't play detective as far as that. But—of course we may not see him. If he can help it, we won't. He won't like being run to earth by tourists when he is amusing himself; and perhaps the trusty landlady will send the intelligent young guide whom I refused to withdraw, so that if he chooses he can keep out of the way."

"I almost hope she may send," said the grand duchess. "I don't think Priscilla wills a meeting here. You have brought no pretty dresses. I should like him to see you first when you look your best, since to your mind as much depends upon his feelings to this meeting."

"Our first meeting is set the know of the 25th," murmured Virginia.

And then Frau Yorvan came into the room with a smile.

## CHAPTER THREE

**T**HIS is perfectly unsafe," groaned the unfortunate lady who passed for this afternoon under the name of Miss Manchester.

"Perfectly glorious!" exclaimed her companion.

The older lady pressed Baedeker to her bosom and sat down with a sigh. "I shall have to stop here," she pointed, "all the rest of my life. I have my music and my night things sent up. I'm very sorry, but I'm certain I shall never be able to go back."

The landlady's eyes darted to the picture. "Ach, I had meant to carry it away," she muttered.

The girl's quick ears caught the words. "Why should you carry it away? Don't you love the emperor that you would put his face out of sight?"

"Not love Usser Leo?" cried the old woman, horrified. "Why, we worship him, gracious fraulein. We would die for him any day; all of us mountain people—and, yes, all Rhaetians. I believe. I could not let you go back to your own land with the idea that we do not love the noblest emperor country ever had. As for what I said about the portrait, I didn't know that I spoke aloud; I am so used to muttering to myself since I began to grow deaf and old. But of course I wished it put away only because it is such a poor thing. It does Usser Leo no sort of justice. You—you would not recognize him from that picture if you were to see him now."

"With this excuse Frau Yorvan hurried out to fetch another dish, which she said must be ready; to cool her hot face and to scold herself for her stupidity all the way downstairs.

She was gone some time, and the girl, who had no doubt unwittingly occasioned the old woman's unkindness, took advantage of her absence to laugh—excited, happy laughter.

"Poor, transparent old dear! So pleased and proud of her great secret, which she thinks she's keeping so well!" she exclaimed. "I'm sure she doesn't dream that she's as easy to read as a book with big, big print.

"She's in a sad fright now lest we inconveniences foreigners should chance

upon her grand gentlemen tomorrow, recognize one of them from the portrait and spoil his precious facsimile."

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